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ABSTRACT

An instructor and her students used questions to plan, teach, and assess a lesson in a Family Literacy/General Educational Development (GED) program. The class identified that their families should lose weight and exercise more to have healthier hearts. They focused on the area of responsibility, called Promote Family Members' Growth and Development on the Family Member Role Map and then chose the key activity called Make and Pursue Plans for Self-Improvement. Students brainstormed what they knew; generated, divided up, and researched questions about heart disease; incorporated all input into a class report; identified the Equipped for the Future (EFF) Standard called Plan as most helpful; discussed and created individual exercise plans; created charts to monitor exercise regimens and time spent exercising; and agreed they were using the EFF Common Activity called Manage Resources. Aware that many students, at a wide range of levels, had little knowledge about the heart, the teacher had students pursuing a GED or high school diploma compile a report on the heart; students at lower levels learned new vocabulary and asked questions of other students. Students planned how to accomplish their tasks and exercise regimen; continually referred to components of performance for the EFF Standard called Plan; reviewed exercise charts weekly to monitor the plan's progress; completed formative assessments; took a quiz to identify increase in knowledge about the heart; wrote reflections for each part of the activity; and identified how they were able to use the Standard, Plan, more fluently, independently, and in other contexts. (YLB)

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A Family Literacy Class Develops a Learning Activity

***Sally Cook** from Plum Branch, South Carolina, was one of several practitioners participating in the SC Even Start EFF Mentoring Project. She was coached by Shirley Wright, National Training Coordinator for the EFF National Center, and Carolyn Beiers, EFF SC mentor, on how to begin to incorporate EFF into the classroom. They suggested a series of questions to guide each step of the process for developing learning activities with students. The questions used by South Carolina teachers are similar to those posed in our 10-step process on pages 6-7. Sally said that the questions "helped pull it all together" so that she could teach in a more structured way. The following example illustrates how Sally and her students used questions to plan, teach, and assess a lesson in a Family Literacy/GED program.*

Because Sally's class was already a community of learners, the students were used to working together to come to consensus on a shared priority. The role map helped them clarify their goals.

Sally Cook's class had decided that they needed to have a healthier lifestyle. As part of making New Year's resolutions, they all had identified that their families should lose weight and exercise more to have a healthier heart. The class knew of three people who had recently died of heart attacks. Together they looked at the Family Member Role Map. They focused on the broad area of responsibility: Promote Family Members' Growth and Development, then chose the key activity under that: Make and Pursue Plans for Self-improvement.

Sally needed to know about her students' background knowledge and skills. She asked, "What do my students already know in relation to what they want to do? What can they already do? What will they need to learn to address their real-life concern?"

Students brainstormed what they already knew about a having a healthy heart. One student wrote down the class's brainstorming on a blank overhead transparency for everyone to see. The class realized that together, they knew quite a lot. They then generated questions they had about having a healthy heart, such as: What is cholesterol? What types of exercise are best? What is heart disease?

In designing the learning activity, Sally wanted to be sure that all students could contribute to and learn from the activity.

Sally then asked the students how they would like to find out about a healthy heart and starting an exercise program for themselves and their families. They divided up the questions they generated about heart disease. Students who had difficulty with the readings created vocabulary lists, while the other students researched how the heart functions and what factors contribute to heart disease. All information was shared, and together, they incorporated the input from each student into a class report.

Students and teacher came to agreement on which standard to focus on for the activity. Students had already reflected and self-assessed.

Students identified the EFF Standard *Plan* as most helpful to them. They had been introduced to this standard earlier in the year when they had done goal-setting activities. Students decided they were not comfortable enough with all the components of performance yet to move to a new standard. They felt this activity would be a good opportunity to test their use of the standard in another way – thus increasing their range, fluency, and independence.

Sally and the students had to consider early on how they would capture evidence of performance of the standard. Together they talked about what an effective plan looked like so everyone was clear what was expected.

Students talked about exercise plans, and each student created an exercise plan, timeline, and class check-in points. They knew that their goal, their plan, had to be measurable and achievable with a timeline. Each student created a chart to monitor her exercise regimen and time spent exercising. They agreed that they were using the EFF Common Activity *Manage Resources*. They were managing the time to include exercise into their busy lives.

Since Sally had been working with many of her students for several months, she knew a good bit about them through listening to their conver-

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In carrying out the activity, Sally considered several questions: "Are students stuck? If so, how do I help them get unstuck? Are all levels of students engaged and learning? Are students using all the components of performance of the standard?"

sations and seeing their work in class. She knew that many in the class did not know what the heart did, how it worked, and what it looked like. She also knew she had a very wide range of levels. She worked with the class to be sure that those students who were acquiring knowledge to help them achieve their ultimate goal (GED or high school diploma) had opportunities to obtain that knowledge. They had to compile a report on the heart and learn about the biology of the heart and circulatory system.

Students not yet ready for the GED also learned new vocabulary. They generated and asked questions of the other students so that they too were learning about the heart and how it functions. All students had to plan how they were going to accomplish their tasks, and they all had to plan their exercise regimen based on what they had learned about which exercises were most beneficial to having a healthy heart. The teacher and students agreed to use charts, and she taught them how to do that.

Students documented their own learning, and Sally worked with them to monitor their progress.

Students computed the percent of time they actually exercised vs. what they had planned and then computed the class aggregate time. Sally continually had the class refer to the components of performance for the EFF Standard *Plan* to make sure they were learning the process of planning. Students all had their exercise charts in class, and reviewed them once a week to monitor the plan's progress while considering any need to adjust the plan.

Sally collected evidence of her students using the Standard *Plan* by building in formative assessments along the way: GED level students had to show their planning process for their report on the heart. Other students had to show their planning process for generating vocabulary words and questions.

To check whether their knowledge about hearts had increased, all students took a quiz Sally designed. Those students who had trouble reading the quiz were asked the questions orally since the goal was not to assess their reading ability but rather to assess whether they had learned the content. The higher level students took a practice test about the circulatory system from a GED workbook so they could see the connection between what they were learning in class and the GED test.

Students wrote reflections for each part of the activity. They reflected on what they had learned, and how it related to their overall plan to learn about a healthy heart and develop an exercise plan. Part of their reflection was to identify how they were using the Standard *Plan* in other ways in their lives. Students also reviewed the other role maps to see how they could use the Standard *Plan* and the Common Activity *Manage Resources* in other aspects of their lives.

Sally questioned, "How do I ensure that my students reflect upon what they are learning? How do I make sure they connect their learning to their other roles as well as to their goals?"

Students felt more comfortable using the Standard *Plan* after this learning activity. They identified what they had learned compared to what they knew when they began the activity. They

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How to plan, how to write SMART goals:

"It has helped me to be a better parent..."

Tasha is one of the students in Sally Cook's class. She has been in the program for four years. Although her long-term goal is to get her GED and then go to technical school, she says that what she's learning right now is helping her be a better parent to her twin seven-year-old daughters. She likes using the EFF role maps "because it helps you out, helps you see what kind of role you want to be; things I maybe didn't think about. It has helped me to be a better parent, like reading to my little girls and helping them with their homework."

"When Mrs. Cook [Sally] taught us about how to plan, she also made us write 'smart' goals . . . like I want to learn to write better so I can write an essay for the GED. I had to set a time line for improving, think about what parts of my writing I would work on so that I could see if I was making fewer mistakes. Even things that I'm learning about my writing I can bring home and share with my little girls."

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identified how they were able to use the Standard *Plan* more fluently, independently, and in other contexts. They felt that they had learned a lot about having a healthy heart, and wanted to tackle cooking nutritious, low fat, healthy meals next. They developed a plan to do that.

> Sally knew that, in order for the students to develop fluency, independence, and range with the standard, they would have to continue to work with the standard with different activities.

While this example illustrates just one use of the Standard *Plan*, Sally's class spent most of the semester continuing to build competency in this standard by participating in further learning activities that allowed them to develop comfort and confidence in using the standard in varied situations.

Sally reflects on her own learning about EFF:

"While the questions served as a road map to help organize my teaching, what was even more helpful was having the* EFF Standards Guide *to use as a tool. EFF is what has allowed me to tie in the four components of Even Start. Also, I have students who have as a goal the GED. EFF has helped me link Family Literacy and GED together. Doing activities such as the one above allows all my students (from non-readers to GED level) to participate in a classroom activity. This is important since learning is a social activity."

Joan Benz: Dedicated Teacher and EFF Facilitator

This issue of the HOT Topics is dedicated to Joan Benz, teacher, EFF facilitator, and, most importantly, a friend to many of us working on the EFF initiative. Joan died July 4, 2001 after a valiant struggle against a recurrence of breast cancer. Brenda Bell, Research Coordinator at the Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee, shared her thoughts about Joan:

I FIRST MET JOAN several years ago when I participated in the Oregon summer conference for adult basic education practitioners. My first impression of her never changed: here was a person eager to explore ideas, reflect on her teaching, and try out different approaches to working with her students. She had a spark about her – a combination of an outgoing, up-beat personality, a great sense of humor, a sharp questioning mind that made connections and leaps, and an ability to connect with others.

Over the past couple of years, as we worked together on the development of the EFF assessment framework (she was a teacher-researcher, then the Oregon field assistant) and as EFF Facilitators (I was her mentor), I had many more opportunities to see Joan in action and to talk through the challenging work we have been involved in. She always made a contribution – not a glib, glossy comment here or there, but a substantive contribution to the work at hand.

Her insights helped us shape changes to the field research process and her experience developing educational opportunities for her peers helped shape the EFF professional development system.

Joan was creative – she was always thinking up ways to make ideas come alive or to be presented in an enjoyable way that others could understand.

Joan was optimistic and liked to have fun while working – she laughed at herself, laughed with others, and found humor in difficult situations.

Joan left her mark on me through her enthusiasm for life and her commitment to improving opportunities for others. I can only hope to remember and honor her by keeping her "spark" alive in my own life.

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